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## Uranium permit granted

*Ticaboo mine will operate for 10 years, be one of nation's largest*

**By Laura Hancock**

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BICKNELL, Wayne County — The Bureau of Land Management has granted Denison Mines Corp. an operating permit for a uranium mine in Ticaboo, Garfield County, the mine company president said Wednesday.

"This will be one of the largest underground uranium mines in North America," said Denison president Ron Hochstein, speaking to about 50 federal and state employees and lawmakers traveling in southern Utah on a bus trip for the Natural Resource and Development Coordinating Council.

The Henry Mountains Mine — called the Tony M Mine — was developed from 1977 to 1984 and, under the new permit will operate for at least 10 years. Denison has been operating the mine since May with an exploratory permit, Hochstein said.

About 50 people currently work at the site. About 150 people are anticipated to work at the mine in coming years.

"We currently have 40 homes being moved to Ticaboo," Hochstein said, and the homes will be ready in the next six to eight weeks.

Denison Mines was formed last December through the combination of the business and operations of Denison Mines Inc. and International Uranium Corp. Denison's holdings include full ownership of the White Mesa uranium mill near Blanding, in San Juan County.

Currently, about 50 percent of the Tony M Mine is flooded, and Denison is working on removing the water.

"It's a random room and pillar operation," Hochstein said, adding that the pillars will not be collapsed.

If there were an accident at the Tony M Mine, Hochstein said, the company has an on-site mine rescue team. The mine also can get additional rescuers within two hours, which meets federal requirements.

About 320 ore trucks will transport ore from the mine to the White Mesa mill. International Uranium, now Denison, has been on the hot seat with environmental groups since its request last year for the mill to be able to accept and process a new batch of "alternate feed" material, which the company describes as "uranium-bearing materials other than conventional ores."

The state Division of Radiation Control granted the permit to allow the material to be shipped to the White Mesa mill. The Sierra Club could have appealed the decision in federal court, but lack of money prohibited pursuing the decision further, chapter manager Mark Clemens said Wednesday evening.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Atomic Safety and Licensing Board turned oversight of uranium mills to the state in 2004.

The company has received hundreds of thousands of tons of radioactive waste from at least four states and parts of Canada in the past 11 years. Out of the 18 previous company requests for amendments to the mill's license to expand waste processing, four out of 23 requested public hearings to discuss health and safety concerns have been held, and every amendment has been granted.

Clemens said he knew an operating permit for the Tony M Mine had been requested, but he had not been aware it had been granted. Chapter representatives in the Glen Canyon area who were involved in the effort to stop the waste from being trucked through Moab, Monticello and Blanding are closely following the permit to reopen the mine.

"Full details are yet to come, but generally, just as we're getting to cleaning up the mess from the first uranium boom doesn't seem like the time to start mining it again," Clemens said.

In the same canyon as the Tony M Mine is the Frank M Mine, owned by a different company, Toronto-based SXR Uranium One Inc.

Uranium One wants to also begin mining uranium at its site, which it bought about three months ago. The company is about 18 months behind the Tony M Mine in the permitting process, said Toby Wright, an environmental manager for Uranium One.

The Frank M Mine will have a mill on its site, and more employees than Tony M. It is in the process of purchasing the town of Ticaboo, Wright said.

"We want to build a safe and environmentally sound operation," Wright said.

The Frank M Mine also was productive in the 1970s but was abandoned when uranium prices dropped after nuclear plant accidents such as Three Mile Island.

In January 2003, uranium cost \$7 a pound, but prices have increased since 2004, as policymakers have considered it an alternative energy source that could help combat global warming, Hochstein said. There are 440 nuclear reactors in the United States.

Uranium currently sells for \$95 a pound. But it can be profitable to mine at \$8 a pound, said Rep. Mike Noel, R-Kanab.

"We have some of the best yellowcake uranium in the world in Utah," he said. "We'd like to get in here and produce it and add to the economy."

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*Contributing: James Thalman*

*E-mail: lhancock@desnews.com*

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